

The suffering of African refugees with psychosis

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With Europe's migrant crisis showing no sign of ending, ground-breaking new research in the journal *Psychosis* explores the harrowing experiences of refugees diagnosed with psychosis.

In the first study of its kind, J.E. Rhodes, N.S. Parrett and O.J. Mason interviewed seven African refugees living in the UK to better understand their experiences. All suffered at least one traumatic event involving political violence; all experienced [auditory hallucinations](#) and other mental-health symptoms.

As might be expected, much of what was recounted by the refugees was bleak. "All interviewees described having a [sense](#) of no future, of losing hope, and of being in a difficult, distressing and stressful situation," the authors write. "The experience of being a traumatised refugee appears to place the person in a bleak landscape of pain and fruitless struggle."

One refugee described his life as 'a never-ending race': always moving, but getting nowhere. Strikingly, this sense of having no future was found both in refugees who had been granted the right to stay in the UK as well as those who were still awaiting a decision on their fate.

The refugees' distress went beyond what Rhodes and colleagues call a sense of 'bleak, agitated immobility'. All experienced voices; five of the seven also reported experiencing visual phenomena. Six related what they heard to episodes of trauma from their lives – often the voice of a torturer, a soldier or a lost loved one.

Most of the interviewees expressed fear and mistrust of others. Being aware that their feelings had their roots in past trauma did not prevent them from being fearful in the present. "Everyday trust in others had collapsed," the authors write.

Many of the interviewees also reported a sense of dramatic, even permanent, change in their selves as well as a sense of being 'broken'. Unsurprisingly, many also expressed a sense of 'losing everything' – a pain often made worse by not knowing the fate of loved ones left behind.

"The degree of loss for these participants is difficult for us to understand; they have lost their worlds. A new location does not replace home," they observe. The tension between the desire to live a better life and the desire to die as a means of escape is also a striking feature of many of the interviews.

By using the [interviewees'](#) own words, as well as placing their stories in a clinical context, this study provides a unique insight into the lived experiences of traumatised [refugees](#). By drawing attention to key focal points for therapy, this article is essential reading for anyone involved in their care and integration into UK society.

Editor John Read says "We at Psychosis journal are proud to be associated with yet another study showing that psychosis is entirely understandable once one stops ignoring the social context."

More information: J.E. Rhodes et al. A qualitative study of refugees with psychotic symptoms, *Psychosis* (2015). [DOI: 10.1080/17522439.2015.1045547](https://doi.org/10.1080/17522439.2015.1045547)

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